

## THE ART OF FICTION

My mother's favorite novel was *Lord Jim*,  
Though anything by Conrad was her dish:  
His dark radiance, the belief that few men  
    get their wish  
Was right for one whose life was subject to another's  
    whim.

Or so I thought. One's parents, in their covert power,  
    are so mythical.  
I sometimes liked to think, despite eight children,  
    she had not loved,  
But she, with Conrad's lofty pride, would have reproved  
This notion, and now I wonder if I knew her secret heart  
    at all.

So romantic, she came down at last to prose  
But of this ceremonious sort, perhaps her only challenge  
    and reproof  
To neighbors with their glittering things who thought  
    she was aloof —  
Papa, so much older, would pick a quarrel or doze.

A woman who stayed beautiful in spite of age —  
She read on with him and me in evening light:  
He lived to be the one to say goodnight,  
And I to have misgivings each time I turn a page.

In this sense only I am Conrad's child —  
Those novels were the way it started:  
I cannot choose between the ways of being  
    brokenhearted,  
Or keeping romance undefiled.

*Charles Edward Eaton*